

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Chana Malka bas Yehoshua Leib, z"l and Yosef Yehuda ben Yehoshua Leib, z"l, Chana Malka Zweig and Yosef Zweig.
"May their Neshamos have an Aliyah!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS RE'EH

Seeing is Believing

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse (11:26).

This week's *parsha* opens with Moshe enjoining Bnei Yisroel to follow the proper path of Torah and *mitzvos*, and not to stray from it: *"The blessing – that you listen to the commandments of Hashem, your God, that I command you today. And the curse – if you do not listen to the commandments of Hashem, your God, and you stray from the path that I commanded you today, to follow the gods of others that you did not know"* (11:27-28).

Many commentators point out the incongruity in the *pesukim*: By the blessing it says, *"that you will listen to the commandments of Hashem,"* and yet by the curses it says, *"if you do not listen to Hashem."* In other words, it should have either said "if you will listen" and "if you will not listen" by both, or "that you will listen" and "that you will not listen" by both. Why does the Torah choose the words "that you will listen" by the blessing and "if you do not listen" by the curse?

The Ohr Hachaim points out that the *parsha* also begins in a very unusual manner: *"See, I present before you today [...]"* Why should the Torah use the word "see"? After all, there wasn't anything to actually look at; it

is merely an expression to try and get the people to focus on a concept. Yet, in general, the Torah uses the word "listen" or "hear" in such circumstances; why does the Torah wander from the usual terminology?

The Gemara (*Tamid* 32a) asks, "who is a wise man? One who sees what is already born." Generally, this is understood to mean that a wise person sees what the future will bring; he can discern a situation and its consequences. However, if we read the passage more carefully, it tells us a great deal more. A wise person doesn't merely see what will happen, he actually sees the future that is born right now. In other words, it doesn't mean that the *chacham* can predict what will be, he actually sees it happening right now. A good example of this would be the difference between Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill. Churchill raised the alarm in the mid 1930's as to the dangers of Nazi Germany; well before Chamberlain made his disastrous attempt to appease Hitler, *Yemach Shemo*. Churchill recognized many years prior that Nazi Germany was an evil threat.

Moshe Rabbeinu is telling us that listening to Hashem and following His



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mitzvos are the very *bracha* that Hashem is promising. The connection to Hashem is a *bracha* within itself; the *bracha* isn't a conditional consequence of doing *mitzvos*. That is why the *possuk* says, *"The blessing – that you will listen to the commandments of Hashem, your God."* On the other hand, if one, God forbid, strays from this path, it **could lead** to a consequence of a curse. This means that not following the path isn't a curse, it just isn't a blessing, and yes, it might actually lead to a curse if one falls off the path completely and starts worshipping idols. That is why the Torah says by the curse *"if you do not listen to Hashem."* But, in contrast, following the *mitzvos* of Hashem in and of itself is an immediate blessing.

That is why the *parsha* begins with the word "see." Following the path of Hashem is a blessing that you can see right now, not a consequence to be realized at a later date.

Penniless from Heaven

For destitute people will not cease to exist within the land; because of this I command you saying 'you shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor one, and to the destitute in your land' (15:11).

The Torah makes a rather remarkably ominous statement that there will always be poor people in our land. In fact, we aren't really even discussing merely poor people; the word the Torah uses here is "*evyon* – destitute." Rashi (15:7) defines an *evyon* as one who is desperately longing. In other words, someone who feels incredibly deprived and is desperate. Quite possibly, this refers to someone who, at one point, had a high standard of living and now has fallen on hard times. For this reason, they are constantly longing and they feel deprived.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 151b) uses this very *possuk* to say that even in messianic times there will always be poor people. What kind of system did Hashem create where there will always be those who are desperate? What possible reason could there be for an infrastructure of poverty in our society?

The prophet Yechezkel, when castigating the Jewish people for straying off the path of Hashem, compares Bnei Yisroel to their "sister" Sodom. What was the sin of Sodom that was so evil? The *Navi* (*Yechezkel* 16:49) explains; "This was the sin of your sister Sodom, that she had pride and a surplus of bread and tranquility yet she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and

destitute." This seems to imply that the reason Sodom deserved to be destroyed was because the people didn't take care of their poor and desperate inhabitants. This is difficult to comprehend; nowhere in the seven Noachide laws is there a commandment to give charity. How is it possible that they deserved to be totally annihilated for this?

We know that Avraham Avinu was the first person to recognize that Hashem, the Creator of everything, deserved to be recognized in this lower world. Avraham Avinu, therefore, made it his mission to bring Hashem into the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of this world. This, of course, became the de facto mission of his children, the Jewish people, as well. At the same time, Avraham Avinu was also known as the paragon of *chessed*; how are these two concepts related?

Avraham Avinu recognized that Hashem's creation of the world was the ultimate act of kindness – *chessed*. The creation of the world was the vehicle for Hashem to bestow the ultimate good on mankind. Therefore, the very act of creation was for *chessed*. Avraham recognized that the real way to bring Hashem into this world is to emulate him and do acts of kindness as well. Thus, doing acts of charity is the

ultimate way of connecting to Hashem because we are acting in a God-like manner. It is, therefore, not surprising that the only way one is permitted to test Hashem is by giving charity. In this week's *parsha*, we actually have a guarantee that if we tithe our earnings we will become wealthy and thus enabled to give even more. This is the perfect expression of the very purpose of creation.

When the people of Sodom refused to help those who were desperate and needy, even though they had the resources to perform charity, they were in essence rejecting Hashem and the entire purpose of creation. This sin goes beyond not keeping the laws of social justice; this sin is contrary to the very nature of creation. It is for this reason that they deserved to be utterly annihilated.

This brings us back to the question of why there must always be poor people in the land; it is because we must always stay connected to the purpose of creation and have this opportunity to emulate Hashem. Just as Hashem empowered mankind through kindness, we must help and empower those who cannot do for themselves. In this way, we become God-like and bring Hashem into our world.



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